

SILVER CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT

Special Cost Share Incentives Available for Conservation Practices

In April 2006, the Clayton County Soil and Water Conservation District submitted a water quality project application for the Silver Creek Watershed. The District's project proposal was recently approved, and special cost share resources for conservation practices are now available for landowners in the Silver Creek Watershed.

A watershed is defined as "the land that water flows across on its way to a stream, river, or lake". The Silver Creek Watershed includes a total of 17,991 acres in northwest Clayton County, extending west from Monona to a point midway between Postville and Luana. The watershed continues south to where Silver Creek empties into Roberts Creek near St. Olaf.

In 2004, Silver Creek was included on Iowa's list of impaired waters. More than 100 streams, rivers, and lakes in Iowa are included on that list. The designation basically means that aquatic life, which should be present in the stream, isn't there. This may be a result of habitat alterations, siltation, and organic enrichment. Silver Creek can also be categorized as a "losing" stream. Sinkholes have been identified in and around the stream corridor. At these points, most of the surface water flow empties into the groundwater system, and eventually reappears at Big Spring.



One of the sinkholes in the Silver Creek stream channel.

The Watershed Project is an effort to improve the conditions of the stream through the implementation of conservation practices. The goal is to demonstrate how landowners and farm operators can voluntarily work together to create water quality improvements. The District is promoting stream corridor, sinkhole protection, and buffer practices near the stream channel, and upland conservation practices that will keep soil in place, before it becomes a source of pollution. Currently, special cost share incentives are available for the following practices:

Practice	Cost Share
Terraces	75%
Grade Stabilization Structures (Ponds)	75%
Water & Sediment Basins	75%
Streambank Protection	75%
Pasture Improvement	Up to \$90/acre
Animal Waste Management Systems	75%
Resource Protection Fencing	75%
Grassed Waterways	75%

Incentives for contour stripcropping (\$12 per acre protected), buffer strips (\$200 per acre seeded), timber stand improvement, tree planting, and farmstead windbreaks (75% of the cost of establishment) are also available. Buffers around sinkholes and the stream are being promoted through the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). District staff can provide you with an idea of how a practice benefits your farm, and a rough cost estimate, during a short site visit.

If you have a project in mind, or are interested in applying for cost share, contact:

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The Silver Creek Watershed Project is supported in part by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation, through funds of the Water Protection Fund and Watershed Protection Fund and, by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal Non-point Source Management Program (Section 319 of the Clean Water Act). Technical assistance is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Continuous CRP – “Farm the Best, Buffer the Rest”

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) represents the Federal Government’s single largest environmental improvement program on private lands. CRP encourages the establishment of grass and trees on land that needs protection from erosion, or in areas where permanent vegetation can improve water quality and provide food and habitat for wildlife.

Since 1985, about 50,000 acres in Clayton County have been entered into CRP. CRP participants receive annual rental payments for the acres enrolled in the program, and cost share assistance to establish protective cover.

Certain high priority conservation practices may be entered into CRP at any time. For this reason, this component of the program is known as the “Continuous CRP”. Some of the practices eligible for continuous signup include:

- Filter Strips
- Grassed Waterways
- Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife
- Contour Buffer Strips
- Riparian Buffers
- Shelterbelts



Wild turkeys utilize a newly established filter strip near Silver Creek

These practices have the common benefit of trapping sediment before it becomes a pollutant to our water resources. In Clayton County, over 4,000 acres have been entered into the Continuous CRP. Filter strips, riparian buffers, and new grassed waterways have been especially popular.

One of the key eligibility criteria considered for filter strips and riparian buffers is the presence of perennial water. Portions of fields along stream channels are typically eligible, but areas near ponds, wetlands, and sinkholes may also be eligible for enrollment. While there are limits on the size and width of the eligible practices, buffers can have a huge environmental impact. A promotional theme for the Continuous CRP is “Farm the Best, Buffer the Rest”.

There are currently additional incentives for Continuous CRP:

Increased Rental Rate: The soil types that are present, plus an allowance for maintenance, determine the annual rental rate for land enrolled in CRP. In addition, filter strips, riparian buffers, and grassed waterways receive a 20% priority bonus. When the bonus is considered, some of the soils common along Silver Creek have bid caps up to \$192 per acre. Limits apply to acres currently utilized as pasture, which have a fixed rental rate of \$86/acre.

Practice Incentive Payment: Producers that enter acres into CRP receive 50% cost share to establish permanent cover. All practices eligible for continuous signup also qualify for a “Practice Incentive Payment (PIP)” equal to 40% of the cost of installation. When both the cost share and PIP are considered, 90% of the cost of establishing practices is reimbursed to the landowner.

Signing Incentive Payment: Landowners that establish grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, or field windbreaks and shelterbelts also qualify for a “Signing Incentive Payment (SIP)” of \$100 per acre. SIP is an up front payment of \$10/acre per full year of CRP contract length.

The establishment of additional buffers can have a huge impact on the water quality of Silver Creek, and the available incentives make the Continuous CRP an attractive option for landowners. For more information on Continuous CRP, contact the NRCS office in Elkader.

Examples of Continuous CRP Practices in Clayton County



Filter Strips are areas of vegetation established adjacent to water bodies or sinkholes to filter runoff and trap sediment. Filter strips must be at least 20' wide, up to a maximum width of 120'. Most filter strips are seeded to a mix of grasses and legumes, or native grasses.

This filter strip was established in 2002 along Hewett Creek near Volga. The Clayton County Chapter of Pheasants Forever assisted with the mixture of native grasses that was established at the site.



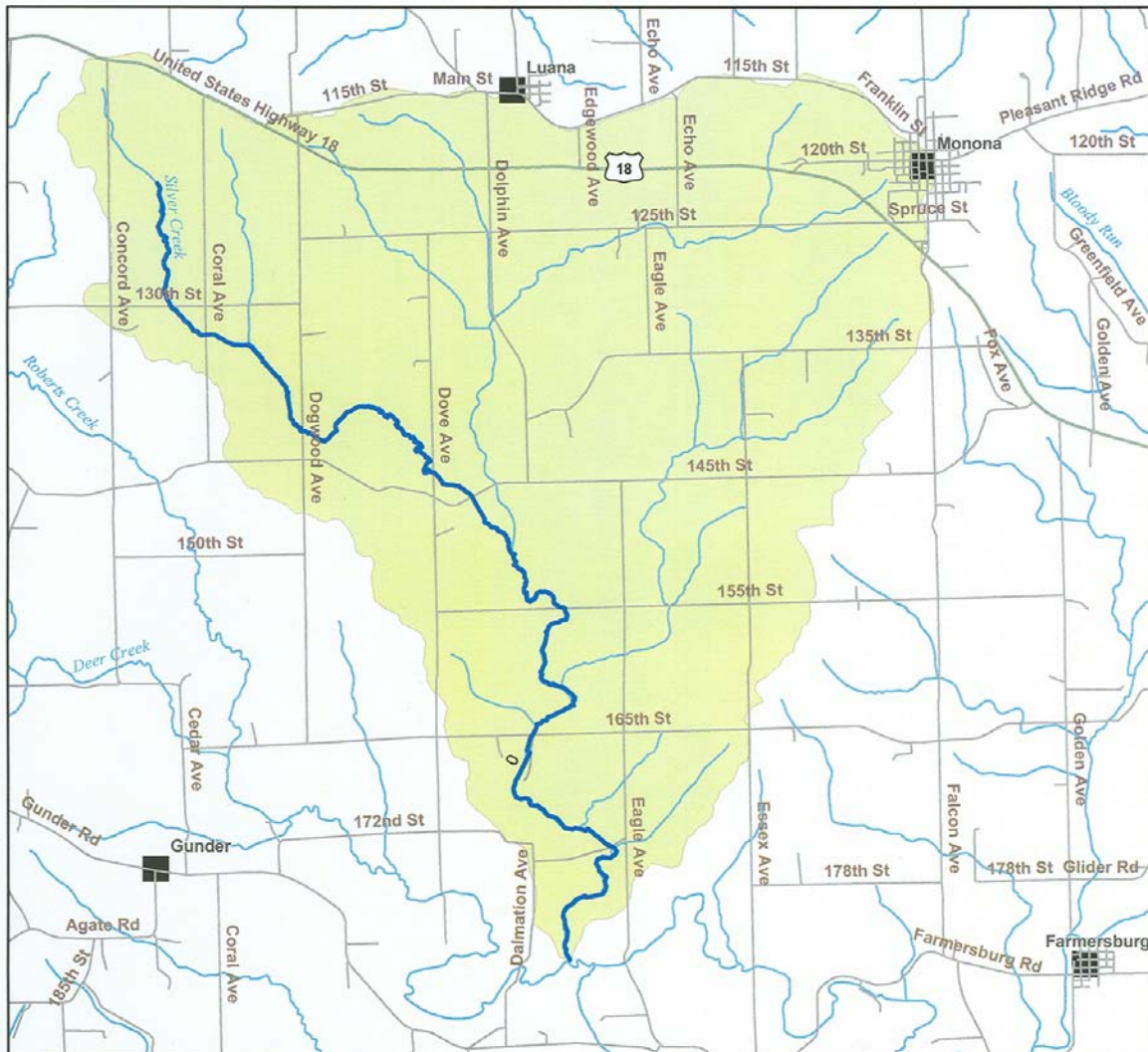
Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife are small pools of water impounded by an embankment or berm, utilized as cover and as a water source. Usually about 15-20% of the acres enrolled will be covered by water when complete. The balance of the area offered is seeded as a grass buffer.

These shallow water areas were established along Roberts Creek in 2003. The shallow water areas followed earlier streambank protection and riparian buffer projects at the site.



Riparian Buffers are areas of grasses, trees, and/or shrubs next to streams, ponds, or sinkholes that filter runoff, trap sediment, and provide shade and shelter for wildlife. Riparian buffers are a minimum of 35' wide, up to a maximum width of 180'. Most riparian buffers in Clayton County are planted to native hardwood trees, but there is a wide range of eligible species. This riparian was a former pasture along Ensign Creek. Most of the seedlings in the foreground are small walnut trees shown shortly after planting in 2001. Some of the trees are currently over 15' tall.

The Silver Creek Watershed



Legend

- Silver Creek Main Channel
- Clayton Co - Roads
- Silver_Creek_Watershed